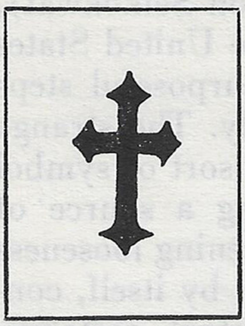

The Future of the Anglican Communion

Adapted from an article by the
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A NATIONAL GUILD OF CHURCHMEN TRACT

THE FUTURE OF THE ANGLICAN COMMUNION

If the Anglican Communion is to recognize itself vividly as one, the various branches, such as "The Church of England in Australia and Tasmania," "The Holy Catholic Church of Japan" (Nippon Seikokwai), "The Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States of America," and so on, should take purposeful steps to bind themselves together more closely. The strange diversity of names illustrated above is a sort of symbol of a looseness which is far from being a source of strength. A further evidence of this weakening looseness is the fact that the Episcopal Church, all by itself, conducts merger negotiations with Protestant sectarian bodies, first Presbyterians and now Methodists, while in South India four dioceses were lost in recent years to the Anglican Communion through a local merger transaction.

Many Episcopalians, including prominent lay people, are scarcely conscious of membership in a great Communion, as our Communion is, thinking of themselves as members only of an American Protestant (and non-Catholic) sectarian Church.

Our Anglican Church, taken together, is one of the great Christian bodies, numbering forty million souls and comprising three hundred and twenty-seven dioceses all over the world possessing as their common heritage the Apostolic Episcopate, the sacraments, the liturgy, and the creeds, of the Holy Catholic Church.

Ignorance in the Episcopal Church of its membership in this great Communion, or unresponsiveness to it, suggests a state of unawareness of ourselves which surely requires correction.

At the Anglican Congress in Minneapolis in August, 1954, where the Anglican Churches of all parts of the world were represented by delegates comprising six hundred and fifty-seven bishops, priests, and laymen, the following was adopted:

> We recommend that the Churches of the Anglican Communion take every opportunity for the building and strengthening of world-wide friendship within our Communion.

Why "take" every opportunity? Why not *make* every opportunity. Surely that recommendation calls for action.

At the very same time when this great Anglican Church is inactive with respect to internal unity, some

of its members are actively engaged in independent conversations with outside bodies looking to achieving combinations such as that of South India which sucked four dioceses out of our Communion. So the great Anglican Communion could be frittered away bit by bit for want of enough internal cohesiveness to act as a whole in such critical matters. Such conversations with outsiders irrespective of the Communion as a whole are in progress in India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon; in Iran, West Africa, our own United States, Australia, Canada, and Scotland. How many are likely to go the way of the four lost dioceses of South India?

The proposition is not that Anglicans should turn their backs on the rest of the Christian world by cold-shouldering the ecumenical movement. The proposition is that the Anglican Church ought to give priority to pulling itself together into some sort of real working solidarity so that it may work together in the ecumenical movement (and in other directions) without exposure to grievous danger of being pulled to pieces by a process illustrated by the loss of the four dioceses of South India.

If the Episcopal Church can maintain a commission on approaches to Christian unity which busies itself in merger negotiations, surely it should be able to maintain a commission on inter-Anglican relations, with the duty of pursuing ways and means of Anglican solidarity. Perhaps the General Convention of 1955 will do something about this. Let us pray that it will.

Such a commission might well be charged with the particular duty of bringing to all of our parishes and people information concerning the great Communion to which they belong, and concerning its various branches and what is being done toward bringing them closer together. Thus we should develop a much needed consciousness of ourselves as a whole.

As a great Christian Church living, through the Apostolic Succession, in the main stream of the unbroken tradition of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church, our Anglican Communion has certain unique responsibilities to divided Christendom as a whole, which, it is plain, it can never perform if we fritter our integrity away in the supposed interests of ecumenicity through pursuing divisive mergers in our separate parts as in the case of South India. We are a great Church, international and interracial, liturgical and sacramental, authoritative but not authoritarian, and united without superimposed uniformity. Thus we possess and exhibit a unique pattern of unity not to be found in any other Church in Christendom. It is a pattern standing before the world as an example of ecumenicity. There could

scarcely be a greater tragedy for the whole Christian world than a failure of this pattern and example through its being frittered away by defections of its parts through separate mergers. Let us stand always together in these matters, not only for our own sake, but in the interests of true ecumenicity.

For this reason we can think of it as our primary duty to bind ourselves together more closely. Then we can confidently cooperate with our Protestant neighbours without capitulating to them on fundamentals of the Faith as we have received the same. This is a delicate and difficult task. But a short backward glance in history shows that it may indeed be approached hopefully. It is not so long since Protestants had little or no regard for the historic Episcopate and its essential place in the Church. Today it is apparent that there will be no considerable United Church of the future without the Episcopate, and more and more Protestants are coming to recognize its necessity. It is not so long since liturgy was quite generally distasteful to Protestants, who protested against "read prayers." But the climate has changed. Use of our Book of Common Prayer, or of palpable borrowings from it, is not uncommon now in Protestant Churches. It is not so long since Protestants could not understand our steady emphasis on the sacraments and sacramental grace, but now sacramentalism commands their interested consideration; and though they may still be far from us in this respect, they no longer lightly thrust aside the doctrine of sacramental grace.

While it will not be exactly like the Anglican Church of today, The United Church of the future will contain within itself all of the essentials of the Faith as held by the Anglican Church. From this we learn that our duty is clear to keep and practice our Faith completely and entirely, and to make "every opportunity for the building and strengthening of worldwide fellowship within our Communion."

Avenues for the pursuit of this duty are not wanting.

We need a common name, whether it be the obviously handy and serviceable but unduly limited "Anglican" or something better if it can be discovered. The existing hap-hazard diversity is confusing. A Japanese of the Nippon Seikokwai (Holy Catholic Church of Japan) might well be frustrated in Australia in seeking his own Church, there named "The Church of England in Australia and Tasmania."

Our Anglican Church needs more coordination of its total missionary strategy all over the world. The An-

glican Congress at Minneapolis did see the promise of the first faint beginnings of such a strategy. We have waited too long for it. Much remains to be done and we have not much time in which to do it.

We Episcopalians tend to think that Anglican missionary effort in general is on the same relatively small scale as that of our own overseas missionary work. The Episcopal Church has only two hundred and thirty-five thousand baptized members in all our overseas missionary fields, no more than there are in a single autonomous Anglican province, that of West Africa. We need to be given a comprehensive vision of the tremendous overall size of the missionary effort of our Anglican Communion.

We need to initiate and maintain a system of cross-fertilization of personnel throughout the Anglican world. This type of strategy was vividly portrayed at Minneapolis by Bishop De Mel of Kurunagala, who pleaded for the older Churches of our Communion, particularly those of the United States and Canada, to send missionaries to his own and other missionary Churches.

We should pursue these and other avenues for the binding together of the various autonomous units which our great and world-wide Communion comprises, strengthening in spirit and in organization that which should and, once it fully realizes itself, will be an open and admired pattern for all to contemplate who cherish the ecumenical ideal. So strengthened and consolidated, the Anglican Church would be an impressive and encouraging force in the Christian world, and would be protected from the danger and the weakening fear of compromising the Faith or of frittering itself away through defections of its parts. Let us pull together, and give over independent sectional action of centrifugal tendency. By so doing we shall make our pattern and example a shining one, instead of obscuring our light.

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